



NORTH IDAHO COLLEGE



Workforce Development Strategy

Increasingly, the chambers in Kootenai County are hearing from our members that finding employees is very difficult. Further, some are not able to find individuals with the skills they need. Many of these members have asked that our Chamber become involved in addressing this issue. What follows is the outline of a broad ranging strategy that attempts to address the multiple causes of this shortage.

Background

The causes of this shortage of workers, both skilled and unskilled, are multiple. As identified in an excellent analysis by Kathryn Tacke, Regional Economist for the Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor, they include:

- **Fewer people (particularly young people) entering the Labor Force:**
The average number of people entering the labor force each year between 2000 and 2005 has dropped 22% when compared with the years 1990 thru 1995 (from 2,770 per year to 2,160 per year). This is particularly dramatic when we look at younger workers. The number of workers under 25 entering the workforce has dropped 14% (from 760 to 640) while the number of workers aged 25 to 39 has declined an amazing 70% (from 1,270 to 380).
- **Unprecedented Job Growth:**
At the same time, Kootenai County is creating jobs faster than almost anywhere else in the country. In both 2004 and 2005, we were in the top five fastest job creating metropolitan statistical areas in the country. To be more specific, according to Kathryn Tacke, "while Kootenai County normally adds about 170 manufacturing and 250 construction jobs during a two year period, it added 520 manufacturing jobs and 1,700 construction jobs in the past two years."
- **Historically Low Unemployment Rates:**
Since records were begun in 1970, unemployment in both Kootenai County has never been lower. For the first time, it has fallen below the U.S. average. Further, low unemployment in surrounding North Idaho counties prevents us from drawing workers from them.
- **Wages Remain Low:**
Historically, wages in North Idaho have lagged behind both State and National averages. While we have lessened that gap relative to the State during the past ten years, we have fallen further behind the national average. In 2005, the average North Idaho wage was 9% below the Idaho average and 31% below the national average.

What is clear is that we need a multi faceted approach to meeting this challenge. What follows is a first draft of an outline of some of the components of such a strategy.

Provide Recruitment Assistance

One immediate way to provide assistance is to develop programs and activities that directly assist member businesses in recruiting and retaining employees. Some of those are listed below:

- **Job Fair:** We have already organized and hosted a Job Fair which enabled 100 businesses to meet with about 3,000 potential employees. This is an event that we will continue to create annually as a means to connect employers and potential employees.
- **Job Posting on Web Site:** We are presently in discussions with a national provider of job boards to associations. This site would enable businesses to post jobs as well as provide a place for job seekers to post resumes. Again, our purpose would be to provide direct support for our member businesses to find the employees they need.
- **Organize Co-op Recruiting to Regional Colleges:** Coeur d'Alene is a very attractive place to live and could be used as a lure to bring college grads to our community. We will develop a program through which employers can go together in a co-op that would send one or two representatives to campuses to recruit employees
- **Provide Trainings in Retention and Recruitment Skills:** We will organize workshops and trainings to provide businesses with the latest information and skills to help them both recruit and retain employees. The first of these will take place this fall.

Bring Respect to Technical Professional Careers

Concerns have been voiced that there is a tendency to dismiss career opportunities in technical professional fields in comparison with college attendance. We believe that is important for students and educators to understand the value of these jobs, their potential for career tracks, and the high level of earnings that are possible.

To do this we will:

- **Organize Facilities Tours for Students:** These are intended to give students a first hand look at the jobs that are being done; the skills needed to perform them; and the opportunities for challenge and earnings that they provide.
- **Summer Internships with Manufactures for Teachers and Counselors:** These short term internships would be intended to give educators first hand experience in businesses that rely on employees with technical skills. These would be modeled on similar internships offered in years past by our chambers.
- **Speakers Bureau of Manufacturers to Schools:** These would be outreach efforts to get employers into classrooms with the goal of sharing with students the potential for careers using technical skills.

Secure Added Funding for Technical Professional Programs

Despite statewide recognition of the importance of Technical Professional education, increases in state funding for PTE have not kept pace with employer demand for a trained workforce. We will build a statewide coalition to seek dramatically larger funding to support both secondary and post secondary technical education.

Create Immediate Training Programs

In addition to seeking additional, long-term funding, we need to immediately implement programs to provide training for workers. We propose working with members of the business community to identify the 3 or 4 most needed skills. With those identified, we will work with NIC and the school districts and members of the business community to create programs that can be put in place immediately to provide needed training.

Develop a School-To-Registered Apprenticeship Program

The demand for a skilled work force in all industries and occupations is increasing much more rapidly than the supply, making the need for highly skill trained workers more immediate and critical than ever.

Employers are now realizing that they will need to "grow their own", that is, invest the time and resources needed to train our youth for the highly skilled occupations of today and tomorrow.

The future work force must be properly prepared and trained with appropriate current and up-to-date occupational and technical skills, as well as possess work habits conducive to success on the job as well as success in life.

Perhaps the best, most effective possible method of occupational skill training is the formalized apprenticeship system. This system of training, designed to meet the specific skill needs of the employer, has proven to be the most structured, cost effective, goal oriented training program available. It is the only system of training that combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training.

There are over 800 occupations that are apprenticeable in all major industries throughout the United States. This list of occupations is rapidly growing.

The **School-to-Registered Apprenticeship Program (STRA)**, utilizing the traditional apprenticeship system of training, will most likely be a major contributor to providing this nation with a highly skilled and stable work force.

STRA Programs, like traditional apprenticeship programs are an effective method of training students:

- In the classroom and on the job.
- For a pre-specified length of time and predetermined wages.
- For a particular occupation and specific set of technical skills.
- With stated hours of related technical instruction.
- Under a written agreement between the sponsoring business and the student apprentice.

Employers or businesses that choose to participate:

- **Are called employer sponsors** because they agree to help train, support, and employ the student apprentice.
- Represent a wide range of industries including manufacturing, transportation, communications, finance, retail, and services.

- Must agree to provide on-the-job training to the student apprentice while in high school, and full time employ the student upon graduation.
- Must agree to a starting wage of approximately half what the professional makes in their company.
- Agree to pay a portion or all of the student's post high school instruction.

Participating students are called apprentices because:

- They are selected by employers based on a number of factors including their high school and work experience, as well as their ability to become skilled in a particular occupation.
- They learn occupational and technical skills on the job.
- They receive high school and post high school related technical instruction.
- Enter into a formal agreement with the employer which includes at least 2000 hours of onsite training.
- As apprentices, are subject to the same rules and policies of all other employees.

Support A Partnership Between Education and Business

School Districts have developed a variety of programs to teach skill sets needed in today's workplace. Graduates of these programs receive certificates of their success. We will urge businesses to:

- **Give priority to skill set certificated applicants:** Employers should be requiring appropriate certificates from applicants and should be giving preference to those holding them. This will further reinforce the importance of learning these skills. We will work with employers to implement these requirements.
- **Provide advice and input to technical/professional program development:** Many businesses already do so. We will add our voices to the call for business participation in developing technical/professional programs. Only by doing so can we ensure that the classes offer provide the skills businesses need.
- **Assist Student Workers:** Recognize that any problems effecting students who are working impact both school and business as well as the student. We need to develop systems to enable schools and business to respond to those challenges.

Make Our Community Attractive to Young Workers and Their Families

One of our challenges in attracting workers here from elsewhere is to ensure that our community is affordable for and attractive to those workers. To do so we suggest the following:

- **Workforce Housing:** Support efforts underway to develop housing options that are affordable to members of our local workforce.
- **Trailing Spouses:** Provide assistance in finding meaningful work for the spouses of individuals relocating to work in Kootenai County.
- **Create Attractive Lifestyles:** Many young workers are single. We need to develop a variety of entertainment options and opportunities that will make our community an attractive place for them to live.